DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 541 CS 500 196

AUTHOR Stockwell, John C.; Bahs, Clarence W.
TITLE Body Buffer Zone and Proxemics in Blocking.
PUB DATE Dec 72
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Assn. (58th, Chicago, December 27-30, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Acting; *Body Image; *Body Language; Distance; Individual Characteristics; Perception; Production Techniques; Self Concept; Self Congruence; *Space Orientation; *Theater Arts
IDENTIFIERS *Directors (Theater)

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effect of personal body buffer zones on compositional arrangements staged by novice directors. Relationships between directors' concepts of personal space and their projection of its dimensions into staging are studied through the use of a variety of proximity measures--distance, area angles of approach, and physical contacts. The results indicate a positive significant relationship between body buffer zone scores and proxemic measures in novice female directors only and not for males, as had been hypothesized. The experimenters attribute the difference in results for male and female subjects to the fact that females' perceptions of their bodies tend to be more concrete than males' perceptions. The parallel between female body buffer zones and female blocking is most likely a function of the clarity of the female's body image and, relative to males, a readiness to employ it as a frame of reference in blocking situations. The implications of this study are discussed in terms of their relation to training methods and exercises for theatre direction courses. (LG)

ED 074541

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

BODY BUFFER ZONE AND PROXEMICS IN BLOCKING

by

John C. Stockwell
California State University, Northridge

and

Clarence W. Bahs
Michigan State University

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John C. Stockwell
Clarence W. Bahs
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

Behavioral Theatre Research:
Actor-Director Relationships

Speech Communication Association

Chicago
December, 1972

CS 200 151

BODY BUFFER ZONE AND PROXEMICS IN BLOCKING

Introduction

There has been ample evidence in the field of psychology to support the assumption that certain skills and manners of perception are correlated with specific personality dimensions. Furthermore, there have been studies in public address and theatre suggesting that public performers, actors and speakers possess personality characteristics which distinguish them as a group. The major thrust of this research has been in the direction of defining the personality traits of the public performer. These previous studies (e.g., Ball, 1958; Barnes, 1960; Drake, 1950; Finfgeld, 1966; Gilkinson & Knower, 1940; Golden, 1940; Tracy, 1935; Stock, 1967) have yielded a varied and somewhat colorful, if not entirely definitive picture of the performing personality.

In recent psychological literature, popular and scholarly, much attention has been given to a personality correlate--body image--and its affect on performance of certain tasks. These body image studies have offered the theatre researcher not simply the opportunity to understand more about the performing personality; but more importantly, the studies have provided the possibility for determining the relationship between a particular personality characteristic and artistic competence. The research reported here is a further step in an on-going project in body image and theatre performance devoted to increasing the understanding of this relationship.

The Problem

Investigation in the field of psychology has isolated four dimensions of body image: (1) body consciousness-the degree of importance one attaches to his body; (Jourard and Secord, "Body-Cathexis and Personality," 1955); (2) body satisfaction--the nature of the feelings one has for the various parts or processes of his body (Secord, 1953; Jourard and Secord, "Body-Cathexis and the Ideal Female Figure," 1955; Calden, Lundy and Schlafer, 1959; Jourard and Secord, 1954; Secord and Jourard, 1953; (3) body image boundary--the degree to which one regards his body exterior as a defensive barrier armed against penetration

(Cleveland and Fisher, 1954, 1955, 1956, and 1958; Fisher, 1963; Fisher and Fisher, 1964); and, (4) buffer zone--a person's reaction to personal space or the area immediately surrounding him (Wapner and Werner, 1965; Duff, Horowitz, and Stratton, 1964; McFarland, Wapner, and Werner, 1962; Werner and Wapner, 1949; Little, 1965; Kinzel, 1970).

In previous studies (Bahs, 1969; Stockwell, 1970), we have demonstrated that there is a definite relationship between the ability of a subject to use his body in pantomime performance and body image as defined by the dimensions of satisfaction and body boundary. The findings of this research suggested the possibility of further research into the effects of body image on a variety of theatre activities.

The purpose of this investigation was to measure the effect of personal body buffer zones on compositional arrangements in novice directors' blocking.

Independent Variable. Humans and sub-humans have specific feelings about the space that immediately surrounds them--feelings as particular as their reactions to the body itself. Attributes of "personal space" in animals were extensively described in the early work of Hediger (1950, 1955, 1961) in terms of individual and social distances of captive and wild animal species. Extensive examinations of personal space in humans has been carried out by anthropologist E. T. Hall (1963; 1966), delineating intimate, social and personal distances in differing cultures. Kinzel noted clear body buffer zone differences between normals and individuals predisposed to violent behavior (1970). Duff, Horowitz and Stratton (1964) illustrated the closest tolerable approach distances surrounding schizophrenic and non-schizophrenic populations. They identified "body buffer zone" as the area around a person within which anxiety is produced if another enters. They define it as ". . .an area surrounding each individual which represents the boundaries to what is felt as 'inner' versus what is felt as 'outer'" (Duff, Horowitz and Stratton, 1964). Thus, psychologists have projected a picture of body image as a multidimensional agent which will condition the way in which a person will respond physically to objects or persons in a spatial-environmental context.

Dependent variable. It became increasingly apparent to us that the body buffer zone was a dimension which may bear some relevance to the director's task in terms of blocking or staging a production. Should not a director's awareness of his body in space affect spatial relationships he projects for actors in blocking compositions?

E. T. Hall selected and employed the term "proxemics" in his long series of studies on man's structures of his spatial relationships. He suggested that proxemic behavior was a function of several different "dimensions," including body axis or orientation, kinesthetic factors, touch code, visual combinations, and so forth, with appropriate scales for measuring each dimension (Hall, 1963). The dependent variable in this study, blocking compositions, was operationalized as scores on various dimensions of proxemic behavior.

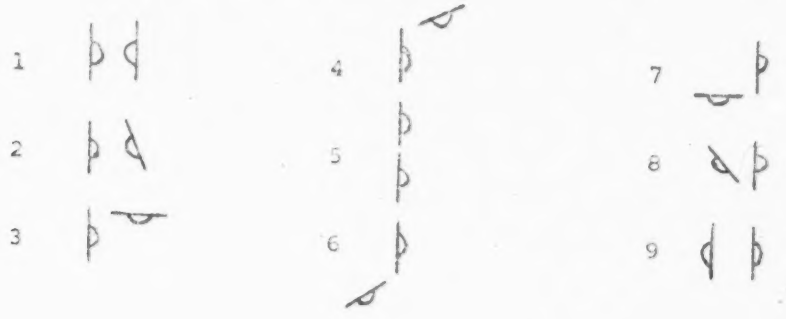
Hypothesis. The hypothesis tested here was that a positive significant relationship exists between body buffer zone scores and physical relationships within compositions blocked by beginning directors.

Procedure

Subjects for the experiment were drawn from seven sections of Introduction to Theatre--a course for non-drama majors at California State University, Northridge, including 62 females and 43 males, none of whom had had experience as a play director.

A very straight-forward device (Duff, Horowitz and Stratton, 1964) was employed as the criterion measure for body buffer zone. The Ss were instructed that this was a study about the way people walk. In successive exercises they were told to walk in their own natural manner while the experimenters observed and took a few notes. First, they were instructed to walk directly to a male assistant who stood facing the S; then to a female assistant facing the S; followed by instructions to approach the male and the female assistants a second time with their backs turned to the Ss. Each walk covered a distance of 25 feet. The index of Ss' buffer zones was the measure of distance between S and the assistant being approached, measured by counting the number of intervening six-inch intervals marked unobtrusively on the floor.

The criterion measure for the dependent variable, blocking proxemics, was somewhat more complex. All Ss were given the same pair of male and female actors to block. A description of a brief scenario, physical setting, and two lines of dialogue were presented in the same manner to each S (director), and they were instructed to move the actors across the stage and arrange them in a suitable physical relationship for the incident which had been presented. The instructions were given to the Ss so as to emphasize the pattern of movement rather than the points at which the actors were located for the lines of dialogue. Several proxemic indices were noted during and after the Ss' work with the actors: (1) the toe-to-toe distance between the actor and actress at the line of dialogue with which the scene ended, (2) the number of physical contacts initiated by the S (director) with the male and female actor/actress; (3) the number of verbalizations from the S to the male and female actor/actress; (4) the number of hand gestures directed to the male and female actor/actress; and finally, (5) the axis or the orientation of actors' bodies to each other at the line of dialogue with which the scene ended. The following notation code devised by Hall ("A System for the Notation of Proxemic Behavior," 1963) was employed to provide an index of axis, or the relation of the actors' bodies to each other.



Results

This study hypothesized that a positive significant relationship would exist between body buffer zone scores and proxemic measures in a beginning director's blocking. The assessments of the data employed Pearson product moment correlations by sex between the four measures of the independent variable and the eight measures of the dependent variable with coefficients accepted as significant at a level of .05. The results are presented in Tables I and II following.

TABLE I

TABLE OF CORRELATIONS (r) FOR BUFFER ZONE AND BLOCKING PROXEMIC MEASURES--MALES

Proxemic Dimensions	Front Approach to Males	Front Approach to Females	Rear Approach to Males	Rear Approach to Females
Blocking Distances	-.06	-.16	.29	-.19
Blocking Axis	-.14	.00	-.18	-.27
Phys. Contacts				
with Males	-.13	-.06	-.12	-.11
with Females	-.15	.11	.04	-.04
Verbalizations				
to Males	-.12	.02	-.10	-.15
to Females	-.15	.01	-.28	-.14
Gestures				
to Males	-.11	-.10	-.21	-.15
to Females	-.06	-.13	-.29	-.17

* .05 Significance Level = .30

TABLE II

TABLE OF CORRELATIONS (r) FOR BUFFER ZONE AND BLOCKING PROXEMIC MEASURES--FEMALES

Proxemic Dimensions	Front Approach to Males	Front Approach to Females	Rear Approach to Males	Rear Approach to Females
Blocking Distances	.40*	.63*	.45*	.43*
Blocking Axis	.44*	.33*	.58*	.27*
Phys. Contacts				
with Males	.14	.23	.20	.22
with Females	.23	.23	.26*	.16
Verbalizations				
to Males	.08	.19	.16	.03
to Females	.22	.26*	.26*	.21
Gestures				
to Males	.11	.24	.19	.12
to Females	.33*	.27*	.37*	.24

* .05 Significance Level = .25

The results may be summarized as follows.

No significant correlations were revealed between males' buffer zone scores and proxemic dimensions in blocking compositions. Correlations appeared unstable for males, tending more often than not toward inverse proportion, though not to a significant degree.

There were positive significant correlations between each of the four measures of buffer zone and the distance dimension within the blocking compositions for females.

There were positive significant correlations between each of the four measures of buffer zone and the axis dimension of the actors within the blocking compositions for females.

Positive significant correlations were also evident for females between other proxemic dimensions and measures of body buffer zone. For example, females' "gestures to females" during the blocking exercise correlated significantly with three of the four measures of body buffer zone; "verbalizations to females" correlated significantly with two measures of buffer zone; and, "gestures to females" correlated significantly with one measure of buffer zone. It appeared that where buffer zone scores could be correlated with proxemic dimension scores dichotomized by male and female (i.e., physical contacts, verbalizations, and gestures) female buffer zone scores were more likely to correlate with proxemic dimensions associated with the female actress than with the male actor. This would suggest (only) that female buffer zone scores would have more predictive value in a beginning director's work with female actors than male actors.

Discussion

Each individual sub-consciously perceives his body as a sector of space that is uniquely his own, serving both as a base of operations for the individual and a major manifestation to others of his being and identity. Added to this for the actor and director is the conscious perception of the body as the primary instrument for the expression of his art and maintenance of his livelihood. The appearance of correlations between dimensions of body image and performance

ability should come as no real surprise.

In our earlier research body image has appeared to have differential effects on the performance ability of males and females. Body satisfaction correlated positively with females' ability to perform simple pantomimic movement but indicated no significant correlation to male performance ability (Bahs, 1969). Body image boundary correlated positively with males' ability to perform pantomime but related in no significant manner to female performance ability (Stockwell, 1970). In the present study, body buffer zone has appeared to relate in some positive significant way to the manner in which females with no directing experience arrange blocking compositions.

The differential effects for males and females have required explanation. Bahs (1969) suggested that the anxiety resulting from a supposed lack of attainment of a largely culturally-imposed ideal female image, much more dominant than any cultural stereotype for males, may be responsible for movement abilities differing for females on the satisfaction dimension. Stockwell (1970) explained the differing response to body image boundary reflecting male and female movement ability in terms of the variable affect of the achievement drive typically associated with body image boundary.

The relation of body buffer zone relation to male versus female blocking proxemics requires similar explanation.

Diverse sources have cited a greater awareness of body feelings for females than males as well as a more positive acceptance of these impressions. Fisher (1972) points out that not only do female children display a greater awareness of their body than male, but the magnitude of this difference increases after adolescence. Females feel more free to invest interest in their bodies than do their male counterparts; in fact, a male who displays open and direct interest in his body is often regarded as a deviant. Further, Fisher suggests that a woman typically sees a clearer and more meaningful relationship between her body and her life role than a man. In short, females' perceptions of their bodies tend to be more concrete than

males' perceptions, and as a result more readily called forth from the sub-conscious and rigidly applied in life situations. It would seem in this research with buffer zones and blocking proxemics that this increased receptivity to stimuli provided by body image has had its expression in the methods and arrangements females employ in blocking actors in a composition. The parallel between female body buffer zone and female blocking is most likely a function of the clarity of the female body image and, relative to males, a readiness to employ it as a frame of reference in such situations.

It is important to recognize one characteristic of the subjects used in this study: they were untrained directors. This was the necessary starting point if the effects of body buffer zone on blocking compositions were to be observed free from the "contaminating" influences of experience. It would be interesting as a second step to investigate the attenuating effects training in directing has on body buffer zone and its projection into blocking composition and techniques. Are females more resistant to repeated suggestions to "open compositions" or "close compositions" than males? Do adjustments in buffer zones themselves accompany females' adjustments in patterns of arrangements in blocking composition, or are females' sub-conscious disbeliefs in body buffer zone willingly suspended here?

Another question worth investigation: the body buffer zone has a transactional quality--that is, it alters under different circumstances to compensate for such variables as persons being confronted, degrees of familiarity, environments and so forth. As the nature of the scenes being blocked alters, will females' blocking compositions alter in a manner consistent with their own buffer zones?

What effects do body buffer zone have on an actor's willingness or ability to take direction when he or she is directed to relate to another actor in a manner that violates their own buffer zone?

Finally, are acting or directing exercises presently employed in theatre classes effective to the degree that they alter the students' body image? Psychological research findings have indicated the very real possibility of manipulating body attitudes via special

body attention exercises (Fisher and Renik, 1966). The implications of such findings are clear for research into training methods and exercises.

References

Bahs, C. W. The Effect of the Nature and Degree of Body-Cathexis on Pantomimic Movement. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1969.

Ball, J. M. The Relationship Between the Ability to Speak Effectively and the Primary Mental Abilities, Verbal Comprehension and General Reasoning. Speech Monographs, 1958, 25, 285-290.

Barnes, T. J. An Investigation of the Relationships Between Certain Personality Traits and Elements of Speaking Effectiveness. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The State University of Iowa, 1960.

Calden, G., Lundy, R.M., & Schlafer, R. J. Sex Differences in Body Concepts. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1959, 23, 378.

Cleveland, S.E., & Fisher, S. Behavior and Unconscious Fantasies of Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis. Psychosomatic Medicine, 1954, 16, 327-333.

Cleveland, S.E., & Fisher, S. The Role of Body Image in Psychosomatic Symptom Choice. Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 1955, 69, 1-15.

Cleveland, S.E., & Fisher, S. Body Image Boundaries and Style of Life. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1956, 62, 373-379.

Cleveland, S.E., & Fisher, S. Body Image and Personality. Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1958.

Drake, F. E. A Study of the Personality Traits of Students Interested in Acting. Speech Monographs, 1950, 17, 123-133.

Duff, D. F., Horowitz, M.J. & Stratton, L.O. Body-Buffer Zone. Archives of General Psychiatry, 1964, 11, 651-656.

Finfgeld, T.E. The Ability to Select Words to Convey Intended Meaning. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1966, 52, 255-258.

Fisher, S. A Further Appraisal of the Body Boundary Concept. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1963, 27, 62-74.

Fisher, S., & Fisher, R.L. Body Image Boundaries and Patterns of Body Perception. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1964, 68, 255-262.

Gilkinson, H., & Knower, F.H. Individual Differences Among Students of Speech as Revealed by Psychological Tests. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1940, 26, 243-255.

Golden, A. J. Personality Traits of Drama School Students. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1940, 26, 564-575.

Hall, E.T. A System for the Notation of Proxemic Behavior. American Anthropologist, 1963, LXV, 1003-1027.

Hall, E.T. The Hidden Dimension. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966.

Hall, E.T. The Silent Language. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.

Hediger, H. The Evolution of Territorial Behavior. In S. L. Washburn (Ed.), Social Life of Early Man. New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 31, 1961, pp. 34-57.

Hediger, H. Studies of the Psychology and Behavior of Captive Animals in Zoos and Circuses. London: Butterworths, 1955.

Hediger, H. Wild Animals in Captivity. London: Butterworths, 1950.

Jourard, S.M., & Secord, P.F. The Appraisal of Body-Cathexis: Body-Cathexis and the Self. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1953, 17, 343-347.

Jourard, S.M., and Secord, P.F. Body Size and Body Cathexis. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1954, 18, 184.

Jourard, S.M., & Secord, P.F. Body-Cathexis and the Ideal Female Figure. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1955, 50, 243-246. (a)

Jourard, S.M., & Secord, P.F. Body-Cathexis and Personality. British Journal of Psychology, 1955, 44, 130-138.

Kinzel, A.F. Body-Buffer Zone in Violent Pr soners. American Journal of Psychiatry, July, 1970, CXXVII, 99-104.

Little, K.B. Personal Space. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1965, I, 237-247.

McFarland, J.H., Wapner, S., & Werner, H. The Relation Between Perceived Location of Objects and Perceived Location of One's Own Body. Perceptual Motor Skills, 1962, 15, 331-341.

Secord, P.F. Objectification of Word-Association Procedures by the Use of Homonyms: A Measure of Body-Cathexis. Journal of Personality, 1953, 21, 479-495.

Secord, P.F., & Jourard, S.M. The Appraisal of Body-Cathexis: Body-Cathexis and the Self. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1953, 17, 343-347.

Stock, W.H. Some Factors Affecting Excellence in Acting. Paper read at the American Educational Theatre Association Convention, Los Angeles, California, August, 1969.

Stockwell, J.C. The Effects of the Body Image Dimensions of Satisfaction and Boundary on Pantomimic Movement. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1970.

Tracy, J.A. A Study of Personality Traits of Mature Actors and Mature Public Speakers. Speech Monographs, 1935, 2, 53-56.